United Nations A/53/PV.23

General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

23rd plenary meeting
Thursday, 1 October 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Chad, His Excellency Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif.

Mr. Annadif (Chad) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I should like, on my own personal behalf and on behalf of the Republic of Chad, to express our great pleasure and congratulations on your brilliant election, Sir, to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. The confidence placed in you to guide our work reflects the international community's recognition of the contribution of your country, Uruguay, to the defence of the ideals of the United Nations. Your competence and experience reinforce our conviction that you will conduct our work with success. Please be assured of the support and cooperation of the delegation of the Republic of Chad in the accomplishment of your task.

I cannot continue without first expressing all my delegation's gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko of Ukraine, who, during his term of office, worked with such dedication, competence and tact on the many pressing issues calling for mankind's attention.

I also pay a well-deserved tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his constant efforts to strengthen the role of our Organization on the international scene, especially in the quest for international peace and security. In this context, may he rest assured of the renewed support of the Republic of Chad for the reforms that are needed to make our Organization better able to achieve its goals in the context of the rapid changes sweeping the world.

The ever growing problems facing humankind — including, *inter alia*, civil wars, famine, epidemics and pandemics, terrorism, and the evils of globalization and *mondialisation* — are making our United Nations increasingly sought after to solve them. More than ever, the Organization needs the genuine cooperation of each of its Members in support of its efforts to ensure international peace and security, the *sine qua non* for economic and social development. The ongoing participation of the Republic of Chad in the work of this Assembly; its payment of all its arrears, despite its financial difficulties; and the presence of elements of the Chad Armed Forces in the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements (MISAB) and, later, in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) bear witness to our desire to cooperate with our Organization in the accomplishment of its noble mission. But this effort would never have been possible had we not first sought to stabilize the situation in our own country, which, until recently, was beset by a civil war fuelled by all types of outside interference.

98-85961 (E)

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In fact, since 1 December 1990, when President Idriss Deby came to power, Chad has resolutely followed the path of national reconciliation and pluralistic democracy. The rule of law has become a tangible reality, based on the Constitution adopted by referendum on 31 March 1996, which was followed by presidential and legislative elections. In order to complete the process of democratization, the Government, together with the National Assembly, is establishing the other institutions provided for in the Constitution.

In this respect, I am pleased to point to the adoption by my country's National Assembly, in early 1998, laws on the Supreme Court and the High Court of Justice. The bill on the Constitutional Council is currently being considered. At its next session, the National Assembly will consider a bill on decentralization.

In the economic sphere, I would note that the extreme poverty in my country is not irreversible, since we have excellent opportunities to emerge from it. This conviction has prompted my Government to take the course of economic and financial reform with the principal goals of restoring the macroeconomic balance, disengaging the State from public enterprise and promoting the private sector. Thus, since July 1995, the Government of Chad has adopted a medium-term strategy for economic recovery. This is aimed at laying the foundations for sustainable economic and social development.

In this framework, a structural adjustment programme has been adopted in order to achieve high and sustained economic growth, reduced external imbalances and strengthened competitiveness. This programme, supported by the International Monetary Fund in the framework of a triennial agreement under its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, covering the period 1995-1998, has also enjoyed financial assistance from the World Bank and other multilateral donors.

Apart from our hopes for agriculture and animal husbandry in the fight against poverty, we rely on the important mineral and oil resources beneath Chadian soil. The exploitation of our oil is one of my Government's priorities, because with the expected oil revenue, Chad's income will increase substantially early in the next century, not to mention the fact that the flow of oil investments will also generate important added value for local enterprises.

In this respect, we have tirelessly reaffirmed that oil income will be allocated to the fight against poverty and will help to finance health, social and educational materials; the modernization of agriculture and husbandry; and infrastructure and environment. In other words, the entire population of Chad will benefit from this oil manna.

In this respect, we stress the fact that Chad is one of the rare countries of the world that is managing such a sensitive endeavour as oil exploitation in all transparency. Meetings and seminars with the various sectors of civil society and open parliamentary debates have been organized by the Government in order to explain this endeavour in all its aspects.

Despite the political and economic advances in my country, we deplore the campaign of lies that is being led against my Government. Indeed, for some time now, disinformation and untruths have been spread among the international institutions and some friendly countries about both the oil question and the human rights situation in Chad.

Nonetheless, my country has made considerable progress in the area of human rights. We have ratified the main international instruments relating to human rights and have suppressed all extraordinary judicial procedures, such as the court martial established in 1991. To better guarantee respect for human rights, we have established a national commission for human rights, which chooses at its own discretion the questions to be considered and governs its own activities.

After more than three decades of civil war, foreign interference and ruthless dictatorships, Chad, thanks to the determination of its people, has succeeded in turning the dark pages of its history and in making the necessary institutional reforms for the establishment of a state of law and pluralist democracy, and it now legitimately expects the international community's help in fulfilling the fundamental right of the people of Chad to economic and social development.

In this respect, I solemnly invite friendly countries and international institutions, governmental and non-governmental alike, interested in Chad's development to participate extensively in the Geneva IV round table, to be held from 20-22 October 1998, on strategic development options for Chad for 1998-2001.

Our appeal for the development of our country would be incomplete if we were not to raise a serious subject of concern, the improvement of our environment, which has been endangered by the approximately 1

million mines that infest a large part of our national territory and prevent all development activity. In this respect, we reiterate the appeal for international assistance made here by President Idriss Deby at the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of our Organization and reiterated by our delegation at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

Our concerns about domestic policy in no way divert our attention from the international situation. In Africa, we are gratified at the progress made in settling conflicts through negotiation. This applies particularly to Western Africa, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), particularly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and, more recently, in Guinea-Bissau.

The efforts undertaken in the Central African Republic first by MISAB and then by MINURCA have yielded satisfactory results. My country is proud to have been a participant in these efforts since 1996. We are duty-bound to work towards consolidating peace, which remains fragile in that fraternal neighbouring country. The legislative elections will be an important stage in the peace process, and the elections therefore call for the full support of the international community. A premature withdrawal of MINURCA, before these elections which are but one stage of the process, would endanger the costly efforts made for peace. In these troubling times throughout Central Africa, we appeal for much more patience in order to enable the international community to assist the Central African people even farther along the path of national reconciliation and security, as the United Nations does everywhere.

The strengthening of existing structures for the prevention, management and settlement of conflicts in Africa must be encouraged and firmly supported by the international community, regardless of whether it is a matter for the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa or the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, located at Lomé, Togo.

Despite the existence of these mechanisms, hotbeds of tension have emerged here and there in Africa, dangerously threatening peace and security on that continent, which more than ever needs peace and security for its economic recovery. Thus, we deplore the persistent situation of war in the countries of the Great Lakes region, and particularly the ravages of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is urgently necessary that genuine efforts be made by the international community under the aegis of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the cooperation of the States of the region, so that the Democratic Republic of the Congo can exercise its right to national reconciliation, the unity of its sons and daughters, its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. This means the withdrawal of the forces of aggression that occupy the entire eastern part of that brotherly country.

With respect to Angola, Chad believes that Mr. Jonas Savimbi is the only party responsible for the deterioration of the situation. We therefore make a heartfelt appeal to the international community and the Security Council to acknowledge the new direction taken by UNITA and to provide it the assistance necessary to promptly achieve the terms of the Lusaka Protocol.

In the Horn of Africa, the armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea threatens peace in that part of the continent. The relative calm obtained, thanks to OAU mediation, must be observed in order to facilitate negotiations with a view to a peaceful settlement of the dispute between those two fraternal countries.

Close to those two countries, the situation of latent war in Somalia is far from reassuring. In that country, where the different factions in conflict are sowing terror, war could break out at any time. It is important to make a concerted effort to reintegrate that country into the international community.

The consequences of these hotbeds of tension afflicting the African continent can be measured in the number of homeless people and refugees moving from one country to another in search of a land that will welcome them, not to mention the very high number of innocent victims, including maimed and starving individuals.

Having recently suffered the horrors of war ourselves, our country is keenly aware of the value of peace and appeals to the collective conscience to bring an end to the multiple tragedies affecting innocent African populations.

The same challenges confront us in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the implementation of the Dayton Agreement must be firmly supported so that a lasting peace can be established in that part of the world.

In Afghanistan, Chad urges the Taliban in power in Kabul and the opposition coalition to undertake a frank and sincere dialogue in order to achieve a lasting peace.

In the Middle East, the hope of peace raised by the Oslo accords is fading daily because of the stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks. We urge all the parties concerned to respect their commitments, as this is the only way to achieve a lasting peace in that part of the world. Neither violence nor extremism, much less intransigence, will enable the achievement of a just and definitive solution to this crisis which has lasted too long.

My country, Chad, noted with satisfaction the end of the bipolar world and the radical change that took place in the international situation. By resuming diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan, the Government and the people of Chad had only one consideration: to diversify relations of friendship with cooperation with all the peace- and justice-loving countries of the world on the basis of equality and solidarity. Thus Chad gave its support to the request that an examination of General Assembly resolution 2758 (XXVI) of 25 October 1971 be inscribed on the agenda of the fifty-third session, because of the radical changes in the international situation and the coexistence of two Governments, one on each side of the Straits of Taiwan.

We are gratified at the progress, however slow, that has been achieved in recent years in the fields of disarmament and the fight against narcotic drugs. However, we denounce the scandalous trade in conventional weapons which fuel so many conflicts and bring bloodshed to so many parts of the world. We are prepared to support all measures aimed at combating this scourge.

Furthermore, and in the face of the globalization and universalization that is engendering the arrogant triumphalism of the powerful, the international community must rise above the disparities among its members and find adequate ways of overcoming the negative impact on a fragile international balance of the mutations that are currently taking place. In so doing, it must give priority to consensus and agreement among its members and reject unilateral actions conducted in its name but in disdain for the principles and rules that govern it. Therefore, it is urgent that peace- and justice-loving nations speak out to denounce the frequent interferences in the internal affairs of States and take a unanimous stand against the economic sanctions that are often ineffective and are unjust and fraught with social consequences, as well.

For this reason, Chad once again firmly condemns the haste with which unilateral air strikes were made against a simple pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan, causing the loss of innocent lives in that fraternal neighbouring country. In this respect, Chad reiterates its support to the appeal made from this rostrum by the current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to send a fact-finding mission to study the matter.

As for the Lockerbie affair, while we support the resolution of the latest OAU summit, in Ouagadougou, on this question, Chad is also gratified that the United States and Great Britain have agreed that the trial of the two suspects take place in a neutral country. We appeal to those two countries and to the Netherlands to undertake negotiations with Libya, either directly or through the mediation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in order to conclude an arrangement for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1192 (1998) and thus to establish the modalities for the trial, including measures of security and guarantees for the suspects. These negotiations are indispensable if this question is to be truly resolved.

That being said, may there be no mistake as to the meaning of our policy. We wholeheartedly condemn terrorism in all its forms. The many victims of the recent terrorist actions against the United States Embassies at Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, as well as the equally tragic reactions that have ensued, force us to reaffirm strongly that no end can justify such recourse to an aggressive and blind fundamentalism.

It is clear that the infinite despair in which millions of human beings are submerged cannot be alleviated by the use of force, wherever it may originate. Furthermore, the radical fundamentalism often inveighed against today is not the preserve of any specific faith. To attribute it lightly to one religion or one people inevitably reduces the scope of the actions undertaken to circumscribe it.

We therefore support the plan for the urgent convening of an international conference under United Nations auspices in order to establish the modalities of an effective international cooperation for the total eradication of terrorism in all its forms.

On another matter which is related to the preceding concerns, we would like to express our deep concern at the present state of international economic relations. It is indeed deplorable to see that the process of detente that is evident in the international political situation and in the globalization of the economy has in no way modified the unequal economic relations, so that the imbalances between rich and poor States are increasingly glaring. If

growth has continued in the developed countries for almost fifty years now, the opposite has taken place in the developing countries, where growth has stagnated, if not regressed. Thus, the eternal problems of indebtedness and deterioration in the terms of trade have been compounded by the problem of the constant marginalization of the developing countries, in particular those of our African continent, on international economic circuits.

In order to achieve the objective of lasting growth and development in the interests of humankind, we invite the international community to work for a system based on rules that are just, fair and more open; for the progressive liberation and elimination of obstacles to trade, in both goods and services; for the rejection of all forms of protectionism; etc. It is therefore urgent that concrete measures be adopted to make it possible for Africa to achieve sustained growth which should lead to real development.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our complete support for the United Nations both in the maintenance of international peace and security and in the establishment of a just and equitable international order.

But if the United Nations wishes fully to play the role it has been given, it must adapt to the realities of the day. It must be credible and its legitimacy must be undeniable. The Security Council in its current form is far from enshrining these ideals, for two principal reasons: first, its composition does not at all reflect the views of the whole and especially of the least and the smallest; secondly, it pursues a policy based on a double standard, which makes its decisions increasingly vulnerable.

Given this situation, the need for Security Council reform is self-evident. Such reform must respond to the expectations of Member States. This means that there must be a recomposition of the Council as well as a review of its decision-making procedures, in particular the right of veto, which is used and abused. We must reaffirm the position taken by the last Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity: the African continent must be equitably represented in that organ where the fate of all humanity is at stake. It is inconceivable and impossible to accept that an important sector of humanity continues to endure the harshness of decisions in which it did not participate.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdel-Elah Khatib, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Khatib (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you and the Government and people of Uruguay on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his successful and distinguished management of the last session.

I would be remiss if I failed to pay tribute as well to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts to promote the authority of this Organization and achieve its noble aims and objectives and those of its Charter. I note in particular his report on the work of the Organization, and I emphasize that he may count on the full support and cooperation of my delegation in his efforts to establish peace and security in the world.

Jordan has always believed in the noble aims and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. We have made every possible effort to maintain international peace and security, particularly in the Middle East, a volatile region whose peoples have, for over half a century, suffered from the scourge of war and from conflicts and disturbances and who have lived under difficult circumstances characterized by confrontation and polarization. Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Hussein Ibn Talal, has always been an oasis of security and stability. It has always raised the voice of reason and moderation and as a result has had to shoulder heavy burdens that have exhausted its natural, financial and economic resources and placed an additional strain on its development process.

Throughout the past decades, Jordan has made continuous efforts to achieve a peaceful and honourable settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It continues to strive towards that goal by upholding the peace treaty which it reached with Israel within the framework of the Madrid Conference, and it continues to support efforts to reach an agreement on the Palestinian, Israeli and other tracks.

However, the peace process remains deadlocked, despite the efforts to move it forward, including the initiative being made by the United States on the Palestinian track. As we recognize the centrality of the

Palestinian track as regards the peace process, we value the positive stand taken by the Palestinian leadership and its sincere desire to reach an agreement that would end the deadlock on this track and result in the full and clear acceptance of this initiative.

We therefore demand that the Israeli Government declare its full acceptance of the United States initiative, carry out its commitment under the agreements and remove all obstacles to reaching an agreement on redeployment and other outstanding issues. This would make it possible to achieve real progress on this track with a view to ending the deadlock, resuming and attaining the objectives of the peace process and ensuring the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish their independent State on their national territory.

Citing security considerations as pretexts for obstructing actual progress will further undermine the security of every party in the region. Security cannot be enhanced except through a just and honourable peace, one which is convincing to the peoples of the region and one which they can defend.

The occupied city of Jerusalem has been the most important component of the Arab-Israeli conflict throughout its various stages. It is part of the Arab territories occupied in 1967. Therefore, any consideration that apply to those territories also apply to Jerusalem, in particular Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

We call upon Israel to cease and void all actions that would change the status of the Holy City. Under the Oslo accords concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, it was agreed that the final status of the city was to be decided in final status negotiations. Any unilateral actions taken before the conclusion of those negotiations would constitute a violation of the Oslo accords and of all resolutions of international legitimacy. Until the status of the city is finally decided, it should remain open to all adherents of the three divine, monotheistic religions. Jordan has for many years assumed responsibility for maintaining the sanctity of the city of Jerusalem and has also taken it upon itself, under the circumstances of the occupation, to take care of and preserve the Holy Places.

On the other hand, Israel should desist from all unilateral actions against the Palestinian people, such as closures, sieges, arrests, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of land and the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. Israel must lift the restrictions that hinder the development of the Palestinian economy and enable the Palestinian people to start establishing normal economic relations with the outside world, free from domination and from economic control. It must also deal with the Palestinian people as its partners in the peace process, partners who are looking forward to living side by side with Israel on the basis of good neighbourliness and equality, not as a people under occupation.

With regard to negotiations on the other tracks, Israel must prove its seriousness about resuming negotiations with Syria and Lebanon from the point at which they ended, ensuring its withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, implementing Security Council resolution 425 (1978) by unconditionally withdrawing from southern Lebanon and reaching peace agreements with both of them, on the road towards achieving a comprehensive peace in the region.

Five decades have passed since the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees began. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to carry out its duties towards the Palestinian refugees — a recognition by the international community of its responsibility with regard to this tragedy. However, in recent years UNRWA has been suffering from severe financial crises, which sometimes threaten to suspend or put an end to its services and the completion of its work. We would therefore like to emphasize once again that Jordan attaches the utmost importance to the continuation of UNRWA's work, especially given the fact that Jordan hosts the largest number of Palestinian refugees and provides services to them above and beyond the budget of UNRWA.

Jordan has consistently called for UNRWA to continue its work until the refugee problem is completely resolved through the return of refugees to their land and homes and/or their compensation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The expiry of the five-year transitional period under the Oslo accords does not mean that UNRWA's mission is over or that there is no longer any need for it to exist. The basic condition for the end of UNRWA's mission is an agreement on a final solution to the refugee problem and on the full and complete implementation of that agreement.

We understand the continued existence of UNRWA and its work from three perspectives: the human, the

political and the legal. To ignore any of them would prejudice international responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees, who have been displaced from their homes. We therefore appeal to the donor countries to continue to make contributions to UNRWA, increasing them as much as possible in proportion to the natural increase in the numbers of refugees and the need to satisfy their basic humanitarian needs. We also appeal to all financially able States to provide the necessary financial support to UNRWA.

We draw your attention to the fact that were UNRWA to stop providing services to refugees, this would in itself constitute an additional obstacle to the peace process, in addition to destabilizing the region through the frustration caused by increased poverty among the refugees and the deterioration of their economic situation.

It is indeed sad that while the world celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we still talk about the deteriorating situation of the Palestinian refugees and their human basic rights. On this occasion, we are called upon to work for increased commitments to respect and to find an effective international mechanism to implement international instruments relative to human rights, away from selectivity and double standards. We are also called upon to establish a balance between these international instruments, on the one hand, and the national systems and laws in force in various countries of the world, without prejudice to the principle of State sovereignty, on the other. We therefore feel that we should recall the appeal made from this rostrum by His Royal Highness Crown Prince El-Hassan for the establishment of a new international humanitarian order. In this spirit, my country participated and supported the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome earlier this year.

Cooperation and coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups requires a formula for dialogue among civilizations and religions to replace the concepts of conflict and fear of foreigners which has emerged recently. Dialogue among religions will highlight the common denominators among the different beliefs of the world's peoples and would explain their foundations to the other parties, thereby making it easier to understand and to coexist with one another.

The desired inter-religious dialogue is the best way to confront the incipient manifestations of animosity and the attempts to distort the image of Islam and Muslims, whether those living in their home countries or those who have emigrated to non-Muslim countries. It is necessary to have a deeper understanding of Islam and the Muslims, away from the blind bigotry which leads to unfair generalizations about, and the stereotyping of, over one billion Muslims. From that narrow view, bigotry leads to animosity towards Islam and the Muslims on the basis of actions committed by a minority which is farthest removed from Muslims and the tolerant concepts of Islam.

The question of human rights leads us to mention the continued suffering of the Iraqi people over the past eight years as a result of economic sanctions. While we call upon the Government of Iraq to fully and meticulously comply with all Security Council resolutions, to cooperate fully and constructively with the United Nations towards that end and to commit itself to repatriating Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons, we call upon the international community to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi people. We also emphasize the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Iraq and Kuwait.

Other peoples in the region, like the Libyan and Sudanese peoples, have suffered and continue to suffer from sanctions. Others who were not targeted by sanctions have also suffered from the impact of these sanctions. My country, Jordan, was the first to suffer tremendous damage to its economy as a result of the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Nevertheless, we have not only patiently persevered; we have made our best efforts to abide by Security Council resolutions out of respect for international legitimacy.

Weapons of mass destruction constitute a dangerous source of tension and instability. The Middle East region has been afflicted with the existence of these weapons. Perhaps the ideal solution to dispose of weapons of mass destruction and to end the tension and instability caused by their presence is by concluding international treaties establishing zones free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in various regions of the world, including the Middle East.

We view with utmost concern nuclear tests carried out recently in South-East Asia in the context of an arms race which, if continued, would have extremely dangerous consequences. A majority of the world's countries have for a long time committed themselves to international guarantees that would prevent the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons. It is very unfortunate that some would depart from this moral

commitment which had previously prevented them from falling into the trap of a vain nuclear arms race in that region. In this regard, we call upon all countries that have not yet done so to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in order to safeguard international peace and security and contribute to the attainment of the goal of general and complete disarmament. This would enable humanity to rid itself of the terror of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

We view with particular sensitivity the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Israel possesses and is developing a nuclear-weapons arsenal. The possibility of a confrontation between it and other States that have such weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons, makes us live under the threat of these weapons and the dangers of their use at any moment. Therefore we demand that a regional security mechanism be established and that a forum be established to discuss this matter in a way that would ensure the removal of this threat. In this context, there is a need to establish conflict-resolution and conflict-prediction centres in the region to anticipate such disputes before they occur and to prevent them from happening and escalating.

The comprehensive concept of security — a concept that is in conformity with the new developments and concepts that have matured recently, particularly after the end of the cold war and the disappearance of the policy of polarization — has become a wide concept that carries within it all concerns and problems — economic, social, political and humanitarian. These problems may lead to the marginalization and frustration of large sectors of society that would in turn sow the seeds of instability and disturbances which lead to the escalation of existing disputes and the creation of new ones. It would also lead to the growth and spread of terror to a disturbing extent.

Jordan has for so long called for the rooting out of the scourge of terrorism by eliminating its causes and by establishing justice and political solutions, accepted and preserved by peoples. We have also called for confronting terrorism with all the firmness needed and for the concerted and systematic international action required under the umbrella of the United Nations, guided by its Charter, to find appropriate and effective mechanisms to combat terrorism.

We therefore condemn the two terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam. We also condemn most strongly terrorist acts of all kinds and forms wherever they originate. In this context, it is worth noting the ceaseless efforts made by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as emphasized at its Twelfth Summit Conference, held at Tehran in December 1997, to establish a code of conduct that would unify State views on terrorism and action by these States to combat and eradicate it.

The General Assembly is meeting while the world witnesses conflicts and struggles in various regions like the Balkans, Asia and Africa. In Kosovo, massacres are still being committed against innocent civilians despite the recent Security Council resolution on that question. In Afghanistan, the Congo and other places, fighting continues despite international efforts to stop the bloodshed and find solutions within the framework of the Charter and the principles of international law.

Peacekeeping operations are among the most important activities undertaken by our Organization for the promotion of world peace, security and stability. Jordan has always believed in the noble goals of these activities and for several years has participated in them.

The world has made important steps towards the disposal of anti-personnel landmines, which every year kill thousands of innocent people and leave thousands more with permanent disabilities, preventing them from exercising their natural right to life. In recognition of the importance of the Convention banning anti-personnel mines, Jordan has decided to accede to it. Her Majesty Queen Noor has sponsored the international effort to rid humanity of this dangerous threat, thereby embodying Jordan's belief in the humanitarian dimensions and the noble goals of the Convention.

During the past few years we have witnessed developments that have left a deep impact on the world economy, including the transition to a market economy, the removal of economic barriers and the trend towards a globalized economy. Such developments place burdens on developing countries and their economies. This requires finding the necessary means to avoid the negative impact of these developments on these countries and to help them adapt their economies to the changes and prepare them to join the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Among these modalities is a commitment by wealthy countries to increase official development assistance, to find comprehensive solutions to the problem of external debt, to integrate developing countries into the world free-trade system, and to improve terms of trade.

As a developing country, Jordan has suffered from economic problems, which grew worse following the Gulf war of the early 1990s. With the help of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jordan has pursued structural adjustment policies that have resulted in tangible progress. Jordan has succeeded in reducing its budget deficit and the size of its external debt. It has improved its macroeconomic indicators, reformed financial regulations in its banking sector and energized the role of the private sector. Yet we still face a difficult economic situation owing to regional conditions and to the impact on our economy of the crisis in countries of South-East Asia, with many of which we maintain close economic ties. Our exports to those countries have been adversely affected by the crisis.

Improving the economic situation in our region requires the removal of barriers and restrictions that obstruct the flow of goods and services among the countries of the region, and cooperation among those countries in confronting the economic and environmental challenges before us. We are all aware that the problems and challenges we are confronting are increasing in scope and in complexity; most of them defy individual or immediate solution. We need increased cooperation to deal with them on the basis of the interdependence and interrelationship of events throughout the world.

We live in one world, a world in which distances are shrinking and barriers disappearing. For international cooperation in the interest of humanity to be sustainable, we must all avoid confrontation and abide by international law. No State should be above the law. We must therefore foster democracy in the international system; that system should be free of hegemony and inequality. The United Nations should be viewed as the framework of that cooperation; this would build smaller States' confidence in justice.

As we stand on the threshold of the third millennium, we hope that dialogue among peoples and civilizations will be strengthened. We hope that attitudes and actions will be defined by the fact that what we do today will affect future generations. Our concern for future generations obliges us to create conditions that are better than those of the past. We can do this only with mutual understanding and coexistence, and only with the political will to create a better world. We are confident that future generations deserve that from us, and we are confident that we can provide it.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency The Honourable Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lesotho.

Mr. Thabane (Lesotho): I should like, Mr. President, to extend to you our very warm congratulations on your election to lead the business of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Your election bears testimony to the very high esteem in which we hold you and your country. You can count on our unstinting support and cooperation during the year that lies ahead. Through you, Sir, permit me also to salute your very worthy predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, the former Foreign Minister of Ukraine, for the illustrious manner in which he led the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

In your address at the opening of this session, Mr. President, you challenged us to focus our attention on the major issues of our time. The list of issues that you provided was comprehensive, but I wish here to highlight only some of them — without passing judgment on their relative worth.

The Secretary-General has submitted a report on causes of conflict in Africa at the request, last year, of the Security Council. It is an excellent report, for which the Secretary-General should be commended. The recent events in Lesotho, to a large measure, fit in with the Secretary-General's diagnosis. Nothing could be closer to the truth than the Secretary-General's observation that

> "Where there is insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important, and the stakes become dangerously high". (*A/52/871, para. 12*)

Our recent experience in Lesotho is that instability is likely to arise even when Governments are deeply conscious of the need to abide by those prescriptions, if other political players are not similarly committed to them.

On 23 May 1998, a general election was held in Lesotho under the management of an Independent Electoral Commission established with the full cooperation of all political parties. The Commission, a

new institution in the history of Lesotho, was without previous experience. The elections were observed by 400 local and 150 international observers, including observers from the United Nations, all of whom declared them free and fair. Soon afterwards, however, three of the 12 opposition parties alleged that the Lesotho Congress for Democracy had won through fraud. Vice-President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa attempted to mediate in this dispute, and all the parties agreed to an audit of the election results, conducted by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in order to determine the existence or otherwise of fraud. The Commission of Investigation, which came to be known as the Langa Commission after its Chairman, Justice Pius Langa of South Africa, found that, while there had been administrative irregularities, there had been no fraud and the elections could not be said not to represent the will of the electorate.

But even in the absence of fraud, the opposition parties still insisted on the resignation of the Government, the dissolution of Parliament and the establishment by the King of a government of national unity in which all the major parties would be equally represented. In an attempt to achieve this, the opposition parties perpetrated lawlessness, which resulted in an army mutiny, the forced and illegal dismissal of the command structure by junior officers, and open support by those junior officers for the opposition-led civil unrest in preparation for an illegal takeover of the Government.

It was in this state of virtual *coup d'état* that the Lesotho Prime Minister appealed to the Presidents of Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe for military assistance to restore law and order and to enforce discipline in the Lesotho army. The responsibility was shouldered by the SADC member States Botswana and South Africa on behalf of the entire SADC. While these SADC troops were busy neutralizing the army mutiny and the virtual coup, the supporters of opposition parties embarked on a campaign of arson and looting in the central business district of the capital, Maseru, which later spread to other towns of the country.

Although the full extent of the damage to business infrastructure is not yet known with certainty, preliminary estimates put it at above $200 million. For a small least developed country like Lesotho, such an amount is a heavy burden on an already fragile economy. The Government of Lesotho therefore appeals to the international community for assistance in rebuilding the infrastructure that has been so wantonly destroyed.

We have already made contacts with the World Bank for a more precise assessment of our needs in this regard, and once these are known we shall be making a more focused appeal. Above and beyond the assistance with physical reconstruction, it is quite clear that the type of assistance which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and some bilateral donors were giving to reorient the minds of our army has not yet had a lasting impact. Lesotho has had a sad history of an army that was deliberately filled with supporters of one political party when that party was in power for over 20 years. As a consequence, our army has had great difficulty in submitting to the authority of a new master. Recent events have underscored the urgent need to overhaul the Lesotho army, as was done under international supervision in Haiti.

Furthermore, all political parties need to submit themselves to the discipline and responsibilities that are demanded of them as actors in the democratic system. This includes the acceptance of defeat in general elections. Otherwise, those politicians who deliberately undermine the democratic culture should be exposed and officially branded by the international community as criminals, as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has done with Savimbi in Angola.

Since 1993, Lesotho has been embarked on a programme of entrenching democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The current crisis has amply demonstrated how difficult it is to make people whose only preoccupation is the achievement of personal political power participate in this process.

The Government of Lesotho is grateful for the support of the countries of SADC in once again reversing a coup in Lesotho. SADC has given practical expression to what has become an all-Africa commitment to the abhorrence of military overthrow of legitimate Governments, such as occurred recently in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The extent of recent lawlessness in Lesotho has underscored the need to control the illicit possession of small arms and light weapons. In Lesotho recently, young people, many of them in their teens, were able to intimidate law-abiding citizens with guns and to force them to surrender Government property and to evacuate Government offices and private industrial enterprises. Small arms and light weapons have become so commonplace that they have encouraged habitual recourse

to violence, thus threatening the cohesion and well-being of many societies. These low-tech, inexpensive and easy to use weapons — numbering hundreds of millions — cause as much as 90 per cent of the deaths in contemporary conflicts. Their proliferation contributes to violence, loss of life and property, social instability, the disruption of economic development and the threat to democratic governance.

During the cold war, arms control and disarmament efforts focused exclusively on major weapons systems, such as tanks, jet fighters and nuclear weapons. Although this has begun to change in recent years, there are still no international standards regarding small arms. Their production, trade and possession remain essentially unmonitored and unregulated. Lesotho therefore strongly supports current efforts to find an international solution to these problems posed by the unregulated proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

The Government of Lesotho is understandably disappointed that its efforts to build and consolidate a culture of democratic governance seem to have suffered a setback, especially this year, when we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Lesotho will not be deflected from the path it has chosen of moving forward to truly democratic governance in which all citizens enjoy their right to political freedom and personal happiness.

Fifty years ago, the peoples of the world set down standards for their security, happiness and well-being in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the intervening period, the international community and the United Nations have made great strides in the area of human rights. Of great significance are the major human rights treaties which have been adopted and which include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The battle to make human rights truly universal has regrettably not been won decisively, although there is no doubt that we are on the way to achieving that goal. We therefore need to redouble our efforts to pursue it.

In the post-cold-war era, attention has unfortunately been focused almost exclusively on civil and political rights, with less attention being paid to economic, social and cultural rights. That development is a human right is often forgotten. Such a narrow approach misses the important link that exists between the enjoyment of civil and political rights and development. The Declaration on the Right to Development was intended to emphasize such a link but, regrettably, this latest of recognized rights has yet to be factored into our human rights programmes.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no topic is of greater significance than the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court. Over 50 years ago, this idea was conceived out of the realization that domestic courts are often inadequate to deter crimes under international law, resulting in impunity for perpetrators of human rights abuses. The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court less than three months ago was the culmination of a long battle fought by courageous men and women for justice. The Statute is therefore our proud bequest to future generations.

Over the years of negotiation on the Rome Statute, Lesotho always affirmed the need for a court in which we could have faith: an effective, independent and impartial Court that enjoyed universal acceptance. In order to achieve this, a number of thorny and sensitive issues had to be resolved over the five-week period of the Rome Conference. While not everything that we had hoped for has been included in the Statute, we believe that the positive aspects of the Statute far outweigh its negative elements.

If, in the years ahead, there is to be greater respect for international law and international humanitarian law, all States will have to take the International Criminal Court seriously and adopt measures to ensure the coming into operation of the court without delay. We thus urge the Secretary-General to convene the Preparatory Commission in early 1999 to begin work on the rules of procedure and evidence, guidelines for the court on the elements of crimes, the headquarters agreement and other instruments. We also call upon the Assembly to endorse the Rome Statute and urge States to ratify it in sufficient numbers so that the court can start its work. Lesotho remains ready to work towards the accomplishment of these tasks.

During the current session of the General Assembly and the twelfth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, recently held in Durban, South Africa, the concern of the international community has focused on the phenomenon of globalization, an issue of particular importance for the least developed countries. The liberalization of trade regimes and the promotion of an open and secure multilateral trading system are central requirements for the promotion of economic development.

While the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations has resulted in significant improvements in market access conditions for the majority of countries of the world, the expected gains for the least developed countries from the stimulus to world trade arising from the Uruguay Round are less clear. These countries continue to face significant obstacles to market access for their exports. There are still tariff peaks and tariff escalations against their major export items. Furthermore, some standards are too difficult to meet due to the differences in technological advancement.

The problems enumerated above attest to the importance of the United Nations in shaping a world of peace, prosperity and development. A question that has plagued the United Nations since its founding has been that of disarmament, and in particular nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapons pose a serious threat to all humanity and its habitat, yet they remain in the arsenals built up during the height of the cold war. Their time has passed, yet assertions of their utility continue. Nuclear weapons are held by a handful of States which insist that these weapons provide security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them. This situation is highly discriminatory, unstable and untenable. The possession of nuclear weapons by any State is a constant stimulus to other States to acquire them. For these reasons, it is a central reality that nuclear weapons diminish the security of all States.

The recent testing of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan was a self-fulfilling prophecy. As much as we deplore the measures taken by these two countries, we must not lose sight of the fact that they have been led down that path by the resistance of nuclear-weapons States to fulfil their obligations towards negotiating in good faith for a total ban of all nuclear weapons. We call upon all nuclear-weapons States to respond to the wishes of all humanity to ban nuclear weapons from human experience by negotiating a binding treaty for such a ban.

Lesotho supports the efforts of the Secretary-General towards reforming the United Nations Organization. There is general agreement that the Security Council must be made more democratic and its working methods more transparent. For the great majority of States, the United Nations is an indispensable tool for the realization of our dream for collective security and development. We are therefore troubled that the efforts to reform the Organization are bogged down in the most crucial area, namely, the reform of the Security Council. The Charter has conferred on that organ the most important responsibility for international peace and security. The Working Group on Security Council reform has been working for almost five years without reaching a conclusion. The time has now come for a negotiating text to be prepared and for negotiations to commence. Otherwise, the whole exercise will turn into a charade in which all will lose interest.

The scourge of conflicts in Africa continues to undermine efforts towards economic and social development in that continent. Lesotho is deeply concerned by the failure of UNITA to comply with the agreed timetable for the resolution of the conflict in Angola, in accordance with the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We thus call on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume its responsibility to apply firmly and resolutely the measures decreed by the Council, especially within the context of resolutions 1135 (1997) and 1173 (1998). Lesotho, as a member of SADC, supports the resolution of the recent SADC summit in Mauritius, which held Mr. Savimbi accountable for the resumption of hostilities in that country and thus declared him a political criminal.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is another source of concern to the Government of Lesotho. This situation has seriously jeopardized efforts at consolidating peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes region. Lesotho supports all efforts aimed at promoting a climate of peace and security in that region, including the SADC initiative as carried out by Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola.

Finally, we remain disappointed by the slow pace of efforts at finding a lasting solution to the long-running problem of Western Sahara. We therefore appeal to all parties concerned to respect and commit themselves to the letter and spirit of the United Nations settlement plan, within the context of the Houston accord, so that the people of Western Sahara can at last join the rest of the international community as a peaceful, democratic and stable society as we move across the threshold of the next millennium.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Congo, Mr. Rodolphe Adada, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*interpretation from French*): It is a pleasure for me to convey to you, Sir, the satisfaction of the delegation of Congo at seeing you

conducting our work. Your unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly not only denotes recognition by the international community of your great qualities as a statesman and experienced diplomat, but also attests to the important role played by your country, Uruguay, in the maintenance of peace in the world.

Mr. President, I wish to convey to you and to the other members of the Bureau our heartfelt, sincere congratulations and to assure you of the full cooperation of the delegation of Congo. I should like also to pay well-deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for the competence and open-mindedness with which he conducted the work of the previous session.

Finally, I wish to express the appreciation of our delegation to the Secretary-General of our Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, in a world where violence, injustice and frustration predominate, has been tirelessly striving to assert the virtues of dialogue and tolerance and to promote peace and development. Peace and development: these two ideals have for decades posed a major challenge to the international community.

It is very difficult to take the floor after all of the outstanding and talented speakers who have spoken from this rostrum. What more could I add to all of the points so eloquently made about Africa and the rest of the world?

For more than a decade now, Africa has made the headlines only as the result of crises and conflicts: civil wars, inter-State wars, drought, famine and epidemics. All of these obstacles so impede the development of our continent that we cannot but wonder whether Africa will be entering the third millennium on the wrong foot.

Unfortunately, Congo, my country, is an example of this. A year ago, Congo had been in the throes of a civil war for five long months. The international community and our Organization in particular strove hard to find a negotiated solution to the conflict. We wish to pay tribute to the commendable efforts made by the Secretary-General jointly with a numerous African heads of State. Unfortunately, we all know that these efforts were unsuccessful.

We are convinced that respect for the state of law and good governance remain, in a sound economic environment, a prerequisite for the well-being of our peoples. And it is because they did not understand this point that the former ruling class imposed on the peaceful citizens of my country two civil wars in the space of five years, the latest of which — that of 1997 — was the most deadly and the most devastating.

We do not intend to dwell on the many ways the former regime violated the rules of democracy, even if this would be helpful in understanding the causes of the tragic events that my country has experienced.

Today the war is over. Congo is resolutely looking to the future. The future means national reconciliation; it means rebuilding our devastated country; it means resuming the democratic process.

From 5 to 14 January last, a national forum was held at Brazzaville to study practical modalities to attain these goals. That forum, which brought together more than 1,400 participants representing all segments of Congolese society, established a transitional Parliament and set the duration for this transitional period at three years.

The Government of National Unity and Public Salvation is now concentrating on the following priorities: the reconciliation of all the sons and daughters of the country; the rehabilitation of our infrastructure; the restoration of State administration; the resumption of the democratic process — census-taking started again last August; the reorganization of our national economy with, *inter alia*, the privatization of the major State companies; and the resumption of negotiations with international financial institutions, which concluded in June this year with the adoption of a post-conflict programme.

Today, in the light of the results obtained, we can state that the transitional timetable will be respected.

These encouraging results have yet to be consolidated, and our country is still fragile because of the turmoil in the subregion.

The events taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cause great concern to my country, since our stability largely depends on that of our neighbours. I therefore want to reaffirm the Congolese Government's commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our country will never serve as a base of operations for the destabilization of this fraternal country.

Understanding the costs of civil war and anxious to contribute to finding a political solution to this crisis,

Congo (Brazzaville) has been working with its various contacts among all the States of the subregion. This was the case in Durban during the summit of the Non-Aligned Countries, when President Denis Sassou Nguesso met most of his counterparts, and more recently in Libreville, at the summit of Central African heads of State.

Our country intends to honour its commitments under the relevant provisions of Conventions of the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations relating to refugees and displaced persons. Therefore, I must solemnly repudiate the false allegations by certain media of a supposed agreement between the Governments of the two Congos to transfer displaced Rwandans located in Congo (Brazzaville) to Congo (Kinshasa) so that they can participate in the war. The displaced Rwandans living in Congo (Brazzaville) are in fact under the control of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and any movement of them is taking place without the support of our Government, which wishes to inform the international community that it refuses to accept any responsibility for the consequences.

In Angola the hopes aroused by the Lusaka Protocol have been continually dashed by the bad faith and sudden reversals of position of Mr. Jonas Savimbi, who is thereby taking a whole segment of the Angolan people hostage, denying them the opportunity to pursue development tasks. My country firmly supports the Angolan Government in its efforts to achieve lasting peace in the country and to finalize rapidly and completely the implementation of the Lusaka Accords. My country completely supports the decision adopted by the Southern African Development Community heads of State or Government in Mauritius, describing Mr. Jonas Savimbi as the person solely responsible for the deterioration of the situation in Angola and calling upon other States to refrain from providing any support for Mr. Jonas Savimbi and his militarist wing.

I would like to take this occasion to pay tribute to the memory of Alioune Blondin Beye, a worthy son of Africa, who gave the best of himself, including making the supreme sacrifice, in the search for peace in Angola.

As regards other hot spots, the Congo always advocates negotiated solutions. Therefore, we welcome the ceasefire in Guinea-Bissau, and we hope that it will be used to work out a final solution to that conflict.

The same goes for the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea; in this regard, we support the efforts of the Organization of African Unity mediation committee.

We cannot overlook the crises and tensions prevailing in other parts of the world, notably in the Middle East, where the peace process relaunched by the Oslo Accords is now stalled, but also in South Asia, where the recent nuclear tests conducted by India and then Pakistan have heightened the already high level of tension.

The establishment of just and lasting peace in the world requires full recognition of the destabilizing factors as well as of the real solutions to development problems. One only needs recall the extent to which peace and development are linked.

In the light of the changes in the world, and after more than half a century of existence, the United Nations seems to be gradually and dangerously moving away from the vision of its founding fathers. Solidarity seems to be giving way to a selfishness that has no time for solidarity. This new trend is making increasingly difficult the management of economic questions, which have already been the subject of much thought, without producing any prospect of an improvement in the living standards of the peoples of most of our States.

Violence, famine, disease and poverty continue to afflict our peoples. The underlying causes of these scourges are constantly the subject of a multitude of studies and various economic stimulation and development programmes, but without result, because of a lack of real commitment by the international community. The Agenda for Development, the international strategy for the development of Africa, the Secretary-General's System-wide Special Initiative on Africa — to cite merely those examples — are just so many plans that no longer give reason for optimism.

Today globalization is supposed to be the panacea. This at least is the philosophy of worldwide liberalization. But how can we be confident when the export opportunities for the developing countries are often neutralized by protectionism in a new guise, which uses various pretexts — technical standards, environmental and social concerns, or even concerns about human rights? How can we be confident when official development assistance continues to decline? How can we be sure when the weakest economies are bending beneath the burden of debt?

With regard to Africa, we believe that through economic integration we can mitigate the undesirable

effects of globalization. Through greater solidarity we can hope to meet the challenges we face.

This year the international community is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is very significant that this anniversary coincides with the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which our Government considers to be a major step forward. We believe that this event puts the finishing touch to the magnificent edifice that the founding fathers began constructing more than 50 years ago.

But today's United Nations is not the same as the old one. Where once there were only a few dozen Member States, today there are 185. The problems of peace and development are not what they were in 1945. It is time to review the management of our communal house. It is time to reform the Organization, including the Security Council. It is time to democratize the Organization in order to better adapt it to the requirements of the coming millennium.

I cannot conclude without expressing the compassion of the Congolese Government and those affected by the calamity now afflicting the Caribbean and the southern United States as a result of hurricane Georges. This wanton unleashing of the forces of nature reminds us that we are all, large and small, in the same boat — our planet Earth — and that we must show solidarity to one another.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Blagoj Handziski, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yusoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Handziski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): Allow me first of all to congratulate you, Mr. Opertti, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session and, at the same time, to wish you success in the performance of your important function.

Your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, successfully headed the fifty-second session. I am convinced that, as a distinguished Latin American politician of great experience and energy, you will also make an outstanding contribution to the successful outcome of this session.

Allow me also to express our deep appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his leadership and to extend to him our readiness for full cooperation.

It is my special pleasure to address this Assembly on behalf of the Republic of Macedonia. My country managed to avoid the turmoil of the war on the former Yugoslav territory and to achieve its independence peacefully. We also managed not only to maintain our internal peace and stability but also to produce peace and stability in the troubled and volatile region of the Balkans. Under much more difficult conditions than those prevailing in the other countries in transition, we managed not only to finalize the reforms of the political and economic systems, but also to democratize society, to build the institutions of the state of law and to put into full function the mechanisms of market economy. In addition, we managed to emerge from the deep financial and economic crisis resulting from the high price we had to pay for these radical reforms, and, above all, from the losses we suffered due to the war in the region and the sanctions against our neighbour, Yugoslavia.

According to the last report of the World Bank, the Republic of Macedonia, among all the countries in transition, today shares first place with Estonia in the results on macroeconomic plans and is in fourth place in the field of structural reforms. Over a number of years, my country has had a stable currency and an annual inflation rate of about 5 per cent, and this year has had an industrial production growth rate of over 10 per cent. The Republic of Macedonia, through its policy of equally good relations with all its neighbours, has managed to establish outstanding relations with almost all of them, particularly with the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Turkey, the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of Albania. It has also managed to become one of the most active countries in all of the regional initiatives in South-Eastern Europe.

Having committed itself to full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, the Republic of Macedonia is investing great efforts to enhance its relations with the European Union and to fully integrate itself into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), thus contributing to the establishment of the new Euro-Atlantic security architecture and to the united Europe of the twenty-first century.

The Republic of Macedonia has achieved all of this in a region in which, as is well known, we cannot yet speak of lasting peace and stability, due to the crisis in Bosnia, the crisis in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo, the recent events in Albania and the stalled processes of democratization in some of the neighbouring countries.

Other factors are the threats posed by illicit drug-trafficking, money-laundering, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and small arms, transnational and local terrorism and so forth.

These are only some of the issues that burden the overall situation in the region I come from, but these are also issues that burden citizens worldwide. We still live in a period characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Local wars and ethnic conflicts continue. The threat of weapons of mass destruction is increasingly alarming. Organized crime, illicit drug-trafficking and terrorism trouble the whole world. Financial and economic crises have become more frequent than ever, as have environmental disasters.

These complex issues, together with the issue of globalization, which marks the end of this century and will prevail in the coming one, as well as the issue of the reform of our Organization, are the main issues of debate at this session. That is why my country, the Republic of Macedonia, attaches such enormous importance to this session, with the expectation that the decisions to be adopted in those respects will improve our mutual cooperation and will strengthen the role of the United Nations in the spirit of its Charter.

In the twenty-first century, our Organization will face a lot of new challenges, which will differ from those we have dealt with during the past decades. The appropriate response to these challenges requires even further globalization of cooperation, through the United Nations, and we therefore should, in due time, do everything possible so that it will be prepared to tackle them.

We believe that the Secretary-General's reform programme is an excellent basis for this. These reforms are in the interest of all Member States, and we therefore fully endorse them. We believe that they should bring about substantial improvement in the work of all the bodies within the United Nations family.

In that regard, we are in favour of the eventual increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, derived from and based upon real political relations among Member States.

The processes of globalization that have engulfed our planet are irreversible. They enhance our possibilities for confronting international threats jointly, but they should also provide benefits for all participating countries. The United Nations is the only Organization which can define the principles, norms and rules, and which can give guarantees that both the obligations and the benefits will be shared by all members of the international community. Only in this way can we, all together, avoid the eventual negative effects of these processes of globalization.

As a modest contribution in that regard, the Republic of Macedonia has submitted a draft resolution for this session on the prevention of marginalization of small and weakened economies of developing countries and of economies in transition.

The international community is witnessing many new crises and conflicts, which most frequently turn into violence of an unprecedented intensity and fierceness. The United Nations has all along been engaged in their prevention and management. The lessons learned from the crisis of the region I come from have indicated that our Organization, in dealing with them, needs to take the following steps: first, concentrate on their root causes; secondly, concentrate on early warning; thirdly, activate preventive diplomacy for peaceful settlement of these disputes before violence arises; and fourthly, deploy preventive forces in the neighbouring regions or countries to prevent their eventual spillover.

In 1992, when the war in Bosnia was spreading, endangering the regions to the south, as well as my country, which was not yet a Member of the United Nations, we requested the deployment of a preventive mission along our northern and western borders. The Security Council took a positive decision, and, as a result, the first preventive United Nations mission, the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP), was born.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express the gratitude of my people and my country for this wise decision of the Security Council, to the troop-contributing countries — the United States of America, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark — and to all the other countries that have contributed to the stabilization of the situation along our northern and western borders.

As members know, the UNPREDEP mission has all along also acted as a deterrent to possible conflicts in the region. This most successful preventive mission has always enjoyed the support of our citizens, as well as of my Government. We are particularly pleased that such positive assessments are contained in all the reports of Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

We are convinced that last year's crisis in Albania and the crisis in Kosovo, which has particularly intensified since the beginning of this year, would have had much more negative consequences on peace and stability in the region had the UNPREDEP mission not stayed in the Republic of Macedonia or had its stay been terminated last year, as some had proposed. Therefore, I would like to express our gratitude to all the States members of the Security Council that adopted the resolution extending its stay.

I would also like to point to the need for the UNPREDEP mission to stay in the Republic of Macedonia until the situation in neighbouring Albania stabilizes and the Kosovo crisis is peacefully settled. As an immediate neighbour, we are most interested in this and therefore, through our constructive policy, we are trying to make our own contribution to the efforts of the international community to resolve the Kosovo crisis.

Even though we see the solution in the framework of the Republic of Serbia and within the internationally recognized borders of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, it is well known that conditions have not yet been created for a lasting settlement. Therefore, we believe that the interim solution proposed by the American diplomat Christopher Hill and the Contact Group will lead towards resolving this crisis. The sooner this temporary solution is accepted and implemented, the sooner will conditions be created for reaching a lasting settlement of the crisis in Kosovo, as well as for eliminating this threat to the stability of the region.

Should this not happen, as an immediate neighbour we are most concerned by possible new waves of refugees, which could destabilize not only the countries of the region, but also those beyond. For the time being, this crisis has not significantly affected the peace and stability of the Republic of Macedonia, in which there lives a considerable Albanian minority. However, all of our citizens, regardless of their national or religious identity, are concerned by a possible deepening of the crisis.

Though some initial steps have lately been made towards settling the Kosovo crisis and broader conditions have been established to that end — such as, for example, the decision of the Defence Ministers of the Partnership for Peace and of States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from South-East Europe, to establish the first multinational brigade for peace support operations; or the positive results of such regional initiatives as the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Royaumont Initiative, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Initiative of Cooperation of South-East Europe (SECI), and the process on security, stability and cooperation in South-Eastern Europe — recent events in Kosovo, in which a number of citizens were massacred, will very negatively affect the overall security situation. We condemn all such uncivilized acts and underline that this is not the way to overcome the disputes or to settle them peacefully.

Therefore, we call for the full mobilization and harmonization of the activities of the international community, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union and NATO, as well as our Organization, the United Nations, since we believe that the possibilities for a peaceful solution have not yet been exhausted. In that regard, my country has invested great efforts to make a constructive contribution. As is known, at previous sessions of the General Assembly, three resolutions for the development of good-neighbourly relations in South-East Europe that were proposed by the Republic of Macedonia were adopted unanimously.

At this session, we have submitted a proposal for the adoption of a new draft resolution on the prevention of the violent disintegration of States. I hope that this draft resolution will also be adopted by acclamation. By this, the Republic of Macedonia is making a concrete contribution and giving strong support to the efforts of the United Nations to establish early warning of eventual conflicts, achieve political settlements of outstanding disputes, and avoid their short-, medium- and long-term consequences.

In the period between the main parts of the fifty-second and fifty-third sessions of the General Assembly, our Organization undertook a great number of activities to resolve the current and to prevent the outbreak of new crises. The measures that could greatly contribute to preventing such violent conflicts certainly include the prosecution of war criminals and the punishment of the criminal acts and atrocities they have committed.

The successful completion of the Conference on the creation of the International Criminal Court is of historical importance. The Republic of Macedonia has fully supported the outcome of the Rome Conference, as well as the Statute that was adopted by the majority of the attending countries, including my own. Now, the General Assembly should adopt the necessary decisions to allow the Court to assume its full functions.

In that regard, no less important is the fact, that within a very short period of time, 40 countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, have ratified the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Thus, the Republic of Macedonia has firmly reaffirmed its commitment to the full elimination of anti-personnel landmines, just as it has, by investing enormous efforts, made a great contribution to preventing the proliferation of the small arms that abounded in the region following last year's crisis in Albania.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law have proven to be the basic preconditions for the promotion of peace, security and the sustainable development of States. Since the very first days of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia has committed itself to the establishment of these preconditions.

Today, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we feel the need to particularly emphasize that the adoption of the declaration on the defenders of human rights will not only create new responsibilities for all the States Members of our Organization, but will also encourage all the activists who work for the protection of human rights throughout the world.

As a country whose Constitution abolishes the death penalty, we support the draft protocols to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture, as well as a broad scope of projects and programmes in the field of human rights, the rule of law and so on.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming the firm commitment of the Republic of Macedonia to the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter. We are a small country that struggles for progress and development within a still troubled and unstable region. Perhaps that is why we so strongly feel the threats and the challenges that are common to the whole world. Thus, each and every State Member of the United Nations, regardless of size and human potential, should make its contribution to decreasing the risks of these threats and should also enjoy the benefits of the current processes of globalization. The survival of each State, of each people, of the whole planet depends on the common solidarity among all of us and on our common responsibility for future generations that could be united only here, in our common Organization, the United Nations.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker on my list is the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, His Excellency The Honourable Eriya Kategaya.

Mr. Kategaya (Uganda): At the outset, I wish to convey the apologies of President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who was supposed to address the Assembly. He is unable to come to New York because of other pressing State duties.

Allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to convey our warm congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Let me pay a special tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine, for the excellent manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. I wish also to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all the endeavours he is undertaking in shaping our Organization to enable it to effectively meet the challenges of the next millennium.

Mr. Filippi Balestra (San Marino), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United Nations has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle problems of international peace and security and social and economic development. It has helped many communities around the world attain peace, greater security and higher standards of living. Africa faces a number of challenges which must be urgently addressed. It is a volatile region in which a multiplicity of conflicts have combined to create a very explosive atmosphere. Refugee populations have multiplied to provide a further recipe for future instability. The situation has been further complicated by large numbers of internally displaced people. Indeed, a large political and humanitarian tragedy is taking place in the region. There is therefore an urgent need for the international community to support Africa's efforts to address the fundamental causes of the conflict.

It has been alleged that ethnic differences are the prime causes of conflict in the region. My delegation does not share this view. We believe that poor leadership, poverty and low levels of economic development in the region are the main underlying causes. The leadership in our region must correctly define and analyse the root causes of the problems and establish clear priorities. It is also imperative that, for a permanent and durable peace to prevail in the region, a

comprehensive programme of economic recovery and development be implemented in Africa. Concerted efforts must therefore be made to reduce and ultimately eradicate poverty in the world.

In this regard, Uganda had the honour of hosting a leaders' forum in Kampala in January this year at which the heads of State and Government of countries in the eastern, southern and central regions of Africa met and held discussions with the President of the World Bank. That meeting, which in many ways was unique and inspiring, opened a new chapter in Africa's relations with the Bank. It ushered in a genuine spirit of partnership between Africa and the Bank. Two of the significant outcomes of the meeting were, first, the decision that Africa would be considered a priority development region by the World Bank and, secondly, a commitment to depoliticize foreign aid. It was also agreed at the meeting that African countries must set their own priorities for development. It is the hope of my delegation that the agreements reached at the Kampala leaders' forum will be translated into concrete action by the international community in the near future. We believe that similar initiatives could be undertaken together with other organs of the United Nations system.

For too long, international efforts have been expended on short-term humanitarian programmes, ignoring the long-term requirements for sustainable peace and development. Past experience has shown that this approach cannot ensure durable peace and development. Indeed, as the Secretary-General noted in his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,

> "Preventing such wars is no longer a matter of defending States or protecting allies. It is a matter of defending humanity". (*A/52/871, para. 3*)

Conflict prevention, including post-conflict peace-building, requires a sustained effort to infuse funds into the region. In this regard, we urge serious consideration and expeditious implementation of the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report.

The massive cuts in social spending and public investments, with the attendant high levels of unemployment, create new centres of discontent and thus further fuel the embers of conflict. Attempts to impose conditionalities which are antithetical to the peace process and the cutting off of aid from weak Governments making sincere efforts to pursue reconciliation or implement peace agreements have been counterproductive. My delegation would wish to argue for "peace-friendly" structural adjustment programmes, if durable peace and sustainable development are to be achieved in Africa and elsewhere.

A number of delegations have expressed their views on the situation in the Great Lakes region with specific reference to the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My country was specifically accused of involvement in the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The facts of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not clear to some member States of this Assembly. Since many speakers have raised this issue, we would like to make the following clarifications.

Uganda's interest in the situation in the Great Lakes region has always been and is still based on the following: the need to ensure total security in all parts of Uganda and the protection of the lives and property of the people of Uganda; and the desire to ensure maximum stability in the Great Lakes region, because instability in any neighbouring country directly affects our security and economy.

These concerns are legitimate. Our position on this crisis therefore reflects our efforts to pursue those interests. Before the fall of former President Mobutu, it was not possible for Uganda to get cooperation from the then Government in Zaire to ensure that Zairian territory was not used by terrorist organizations to create insecurity along the Uganda-Zaire border and inside Uganda.

When President Laurent Kabila came to power it was mutually agreed between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that our two armies would jointly operate in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to contain and eventually remove the bandits who were using the bases they had in the area to destabilize Uganda. Pursuant to that understanding, Uganda has since maintained a military presence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the provision of the bilateral agreement between our two countries. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today necessitates that Uganda must maintain that military presence, which is crucial for the security of our country and our people.

Let me make it clear to all and sundry that Uganda has no territorial designs on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is not the primary responsibility of Uganda

to dictate the political arrangements of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, any internal arrangement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which does not take into account the legitimate security concerns of its neighbours is our concern. We would like to say that unilateral military intervention by individual countries or sectional intervention by groups of countries is unacceptable. These actions are likely to escalate the problem. If there are good reasons for an intervention, it should be regional, carried out, for example, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or even the United Nations, and in the context of the peace initiatives that are already in place.

We would therefore like to stress that there are serious regional efforts to address the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe these efforts should be supported by the entire membership of this Organization and by all parties that are interested in the conflict and have a vested interest in peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

Uganda's commitment to the full respect for and universal enjoyment of human rights is well known. However, we regret that crimes are now being committed on a daily basis against the people of Uganda by surrogate forces of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) with the full knowledge and assistance of their sponsors, who do not believe in freedom and respect for human rights. Innocent children are abducted daily, subjected to forced labour and military service and made victims of other, similar crimes, with the support of the sponsors of these terrorist groups. The world awoke to this horrendous crime at the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, when it adopted draft resolution E/CN.4/1998/L.40, which calls upon the LRA and its sponsors to release all the abducted children immediately and unconditionally.

My delegation believes that without external support the Lord's Resistance Army would not be in a position to commit these atrocities and defy international public opinion on this extremely important matter. We call upon the international community to intensify pressure on the countries involved to stop backing these terrorists. On the other hand, we wish to thank the United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and all others who have been involved in seeking the freedom of these children. We hope their efforts will not be in vain.

The United Nations is a vibrant institution for many reasons, among them its unwavering support for actions aimed at advancing freedom, peace and security. Today, terrorism poses a serious threat to these values. Individuals and organizations whose stock in trade is the violation of these values roam the globe with impunity. Recent attacks in East Africa came at a time when we thought the world had learned the futility of such senseless, wanton murder and destruction. It is the firm belief of my delegation that the international community should collectively take action to deny sanctuary to these savages. Countries known to harbour such elements should be isolated and punished severely so that human freedom can be protected. My delegation further believes that this is an opportune moment to convene an international conference on terrorism which must map out strategies to deal with this escalating problem.

Last year the world had only five declared nuclear States; today we have seven; next year we may have more. In essence, such non-proliferation agreements as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) have not deterred the emergence of new nuclear States.

The philosophy of dependence on nuclear weapons for security is, in a creeping and disturbing fashion, becoming universal. This situation is creating new dangers for the survival of mankind. My delegation believes that a new universal security doctrine needs to evolve. All nuclear weapons should be eliminated. In line with this belief, my delegation calls for the adoption of an action plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework. Such an approach should be universal, and not regional or discriminatory, if it is to achieve the desired goals.

Since the last session of the General Assembly, several developments have taken place in the international arena, some of which have offered hope and encouragement, while others have led to destruction and despair.

The issue of Western Sahara is of concern to my delegation. We are concerned by the slow progress towards the holding of a United Nations-supervised referendum on the self-determination of the people of that territory. We appeal to the parties to overcome their differences and allow a just and impartial referendum to take place.

On the Lockerbie incident, Uganda welcomes the initial moves taken in a bid to solve the problem between the United States of America and the United Kingdom on the one hand and Libya on the other. We encourage the Secretary-General to work out comprehensive and clear arrangements, acceptable to all concerned parties, so that the matter can finally be resolved.

Today we live in a globalized world. Globalization has created new opportunities as well as grave risks and challenges. Its impact has strengthened the developed countries and weakened the developing countries. Such a situation does not augur well for international peace and security. There is an urgent need for deliberate policies to reorient international trade and finance. The crisis in South-East Asia should serve as a warning to the world of the catastrophe that inaction will breed. The ever widening gap between the developed and the developing countries and among countries in the South could also become a source of future instability. There should be no delay in addressing these problems. My delegation calls upon the developed countries to honour their obligations and increase the transfer of resources to the developing countries for the transformation of their economies, so that they may become equal partners in the global economy.

In the recent past, despite drastic limitations in both human and financial resources, the United Nations has responded admirably to the challenges of the era, including peacekeeping, emergency operations and development. It has a commendable record which should serve to strengthen our confidence in the Organization.

As we inch our way into the twenty-first century, we should translate this confidence into the necessary political will to strengthen the Organization. We should demonstrate our faith and dedication to the United Nations and its component parts by providing it with the resources necessary to fulfil its immense mandate. Our challenge is to bequeath to succeeding generations a strong United Nations, able to guarantee the principles enshrined in the preamble of its Charter.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Mr. Sama Banya.

Mr. Banya (Sierra Leone): Permit me to offer, on behalf of President Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the Government and the people of Sierra Leone, our warm felicitations to Mr. Didier Opertti on his unanimous election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, and to express our delegation's confidence that under his able guidance our session will be a successful one. We are in no doubt that his distinguished public record adequately equips him for the position he has been called upon to assume, and we have already seen evidence of this in the last two weeks. We must also express gratitude to his predecessor, Mr. Udovenko of Ukraine, for a job well done.

Our gratitude also goes to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, and to the entire staff of the United Nations common system for their relentless efforts in helping the people of Sierra Leone in the mammoth task of reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of our compatriots who were the unfortunate victims of nine months of junta misrule. Mr. Annan has put the international ship of state on the right course, and my delegation wishes him continued success.

This time last year, my President addressed the Assembly on the subject of the situation in Sierra Leone. I am sure most members will remember the picture he painted of the tragic events and the turmoil that followed when a democratically elected Government was overthrown by a bunch of military adventurists, aided and abetted by some civilian opportunists who became their active collaborators. Thanks to the resilience of the whole of civil society, encouraged and backed by the international community, I am here today representing the legitimate, reinstated Government of Sierra Leone.

Against all odds, our people defied the violent and misguided gun-toting anarchists who appeared to have one objective, and one only: the total destruction of the civil society of Sierra Leone. Mercifully, that nightmare is now behind us.

In February this year, the forces of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), under the then ECOWAS Chairman, the late General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, led by Nigeria and with the support of our Civil Defence Unit, removed the junta. This was preceded by several attempts to arrive at a negotiated settlement. The international community was to learn that the junta and their allies, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), always negotiated in bad faith and were not to be trusted.

The atrocities committed by the junta during their nine-month reign, especially after they retreated to the eastern and northern parts of the country, had to be seen

to be believed. Rape, murder, mutilation, vandalism and the burning down of whole villages were the order of the day. Unarmed civilians, particularly women and children, were their unfortunate victims.

Because of the wanton destruction perpetrated by the junta and, much earlier, by the RUF, there is a great need to revamp the economy and for reconstruction. In a report to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General referred to the Special Conference on Sierra Leone, which he convened here at United Nations Headquarters on 30 July this year. The international community was invited to focus on the situation in Sierra Leone.

We were very much encouraged, not only by the deliberations and results of that conference, but also by the deliberations of the second ministerial-level Security Council meeting on Africa, held last week, in which Sierra Leone featured prominently.

The humanitarian crisis is immense: there are many refugees and displaced persons. The disarmament and demobilization exercise and the resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes require many resources. Some of the pledges that were made are now being fulfilled, but much remains to be done.

Allow me to echo the appeal of the Secretary-General to those who have yet to pledge, and to others who have yet to deliver, to do all they can to help us. In the meantime, I would like to express profound gratitude to all members, and especially to the members of the contact group to be coordinated by the United Kingdom, for what has been achieved so far.

As soon as the legitimate Government was overthrown, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), at its meeting in Harare in June 1997, unanimously condemned the takeover and called on the junta to return power and constitutionality to the elected Government and to the country respectively. The prompt action of ECOWAS, the resultant peace in Liberia and now the return of democracy to Sierra Leone, clearly demonstrate what a regional organization can achieve if the determination and the leadership are there. ECOMOG has the capacity to deliver, but it needs the tools, which only the international community can provide.

My country is fully aware that even though the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)/RUF junta has been ousted, the peace and security that were achieved with enormous sacrifice by the people of Sierra Leone have yet to be consolidated. It is therefore in the interests of the people that the international community in general and the forces of the subregion in particular, maintain their presence in Sierra Leone until we can create a new national army. In this regard, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has agreed to the secondment of Brigadier-General Maxwell Khobe, Commander of the ECOMOG Force in Sierra Leone, as our Chief of Defence Staff. He is already working on the modalities for forming a well-trained and dedicated army which will be alive to its responsibility as defender of our Constitution. I have every reason to believe that that assignment will be carried out with the same professionalism that has been the hallmark of ECOMOG operations in both Liberia and Sierra Leone.

At this juncture, I would like to state that the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone is committed to the demobilization, disarmament and integration of all ex-combatants, as provided for in both the Abidjan Peace Accord and the Conakry peace plan, despite the lack of good faith that has been demonstrated by both the RUF and the junta. This programme is at the top of our post-conflict agenda, and the Disarmament Committee itself is under the chairmanship of no less a person than our President.

Because of its overwhelming desire to uphold the principles of democracy and good governance, the Government lays much emphasis on the rule of law, human rights and freedom of expression. There are over 48 newspaper publications in a country with 80 per cent illiteracy. Despite propaganda to the contrary, no journalists have been prosecuted, let alone convicted, for practising their profession — not even when the headlines of a few have sometimes bordered on libel. Of the 16 people recently convicted of treason, after a trial that was declared transparent and fair, five were journalists; but they were not charged for the practice of journalism.

President Kabbah and the ECOMOG Force Commander informed the Special Conference on Sierra Leone that more than 90 per cent of the country was secure and safe. Remnants of the junta and the RUF are, however, perched in small areas in the east and north-east and operate only because they continue to have a safe haven in a neighbouring country, while one other country renders its support to them from outside Sierra Leone. That notwithstanding, every effort is now being made by both ECOMOG and the Civil Defence Unit to flush them out and to finally put this whole tragic affair behind us.

The treason trials of both civilians and former junta members are still in progress, under laws which have been in existence since independence. Soon after sentence was passed on the first group, some misguided organizations began unfairly pressurizing the President to intervene; they even mounted a vicious propaganda campaign in the name of human rights.

My country is governed by the rule of law. Under our constitution there is separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. While the due process of law is in progress, the President cannot and will not interfere with it. At the end of the exercise those who lose their final appeals to the Supreme Court can apply to the Prerogative of Mercy Committee. Then, and only then, will the President step in, and he has already given that assurance.

Our President has not only gone the extra mile, but is seen to be bending over backwards to bring together all the main political groups into the mainstream of the post-conflict nation-building exercise, so as to secure permanent peace and security. There have been no instances of human rights violations since President Kabbah assumed office.

With regard to the armed rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rebel wars in Angola, Sudan and elsewhere, we appeal to the parties in those conflicts to lay down their arms, to refrain from further provocative activities that ignite tempers and to give peace a chance.

Our Government welcomes the successful outcome of the United Nations Diplomatic Conference on the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which took place in Rome, Italy, in June 1998. Sierra Leone is firmly committed to the early establishment of a permanent international court, and my Government has already signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We urge every nation to sign and ratify the Statute. It will be not only testimony to the common desire to overcome long neglected failures of national legal systems, but a unique chance to contribute to international stability deterrence and, hopefully, the prevention of atrocious crimes.

Security Council reform is one of the most difficult issues which have to be tackled during this session. While progress has been made in some areas, and new ideas and proposals have emerged, the Working Group has not presented recommendations to the General Assembly. Sierra Leone agrees with the position of the Non-Aligned Movement on the curtailment, limitation and subsequent elimination of the veto. Sierra Leone fully endorses the decision of the Assembly of the Heads of State or Government of the Organization of African Unity for two permanent seats to be allocated to our continent.

As for the expansion of the Security Council, Sierra Leone supports the position taken by the Non-Aligned Movement, that, in order to enhance its credibility, the new Council should reflect the universal character of the world and correct existing imbalances in its composition.

My country cannot talk of conflicts and peace without referring to nuclear arms. When negotiations were being conducted in Geneva on a comprehensive test-ban treaty, a few years ago, the Republic of Sierra Leone was one of those countries which prayed silently for its success. We are relieved and thankful that the Treaty has been signed by a large number of countries. We continue to call on all nations to sign the test-ban treaty and refrain from further tests, with their attendant danger to the future of mankind.

In the same way as we oppose all future nuclear tests, we must with all the emphasis at our disposal condemn all forms of terrorism, both domestic and international. We refer particularly to the recent bombings which claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent people, not to mention the loss of property worth millions of dollars in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam, Cape Town and Northern Ireland. We call on the international community to coordinate its efforts to fight this menace. Those who insist on using this method to achieve their aims should be tracked down and brought to justice. In this regard, my country wholeheartedly supports the signing and ratification of all the Conventions on terrorism and appeals to the entire international community to adhere to the Conventions in order to make the world a safer place for our children's children.

My Government noted with great delight the conference convened last year in South Africa to focus the world's attention on the dangers posed to human life by landmines. We revive the memory of the late Princess Diana, who did so much to focus the attention of the international community on the horrors of landmines. In our own country, too, landmines were strewn around with carefree abandon by the AFRC/RUF junta, resulting in the maiming and death of innocent civilians, especially children.

Many African and other third world countries, including my own, are today still grappling with severe economic problems. The effects of the debt burden, the unfavourable balances of trade and payment, and the unpredictability of the prices of their products on the world market have all contributed to the deteriorating economic conditions they are facing. In addition to these external factors, misguided policies and political instability caused by various kinds of civil strife have caused their economies to sink further. Globalization and trade liberalization have become inevitable phases in world trade. It has, however, become obvious that our countries have fared badly and will continue to be at a disadvantage unless there is a change of attitude and even procedure on the part of developed, industrialized countries. The resultant imbalances can be overcome if every effort is made to create a level playing field by removing the debt burden of our countries and opening up markets to African and third world products. Some countries have already done so; we hope that others will follow soon.

I have already mentioned the refugee situation in my own country. It is grim, and yet the situation is the same in other parts of the world, especially Africa, which has the largest refugee populations. This situation has continued to exert tremendous pressure on the already weak economies of the host countries, which are forced to spend part of their meagre resources on the welfare of refugees. Having gone through this experience both as recipient and exporter of refugees, we must commend the donor community and especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Much is being done for us, but even the Office acknowledges that the situation of our refugees in neighbouring countries is desperate. I would like to appeal to the donor community to shed its donor fatigue syndrome and continue to respond positively to the needs of a people who are the innocent victims of events not of their own making. A very urgent need now is for the repatriation of our people from neighbouring countries, where life in camps is now a nightmare.

Sierra Leone is one of the countries in our subregion that still have the remnants of what were once the Upper Guinea rain forest, which stretches from Sierra Leone down to the Cameroons. The reserve supports the largest number of animal species in Sierra Leone: a total of 46 mammal species, including Western chimpanzees, red colobus monkeys, Diana monkeys, duickers, leopards and forest elephants. Two hundred and seventy four species of birds are to be found in the Gola rain forest. These include 10 globally threatened species — 8 restricted to the Upper Guinea forest block — and 169 forest-dependent species. There is a very rich diversity of interesting invertebrates, including two species of dragonfly, endemic only to parts of the Upper Guinea forest, as well as the rare African swallow-tailed butterfly, which has Sierra Leone as the westernmost limit of its range in Africa.

Unfortunately, the Gola rain forest, like most other forest areas on the continent, is under considerable pressure. Much of the forest cover is lost annually from logging and from brush burning as well as shifting cultivation carried out by an ever-increasing population. Conservation of these forests in Sierra Leone, as in other parts of Africa, is linked with poverty. The Forestry Division of our Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment has a Gola Rain Forest Conservation Programme. The programme is being operated in collaboration with a local non-governmental organization, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone partner of Birdlife International, which sponsors the programme.

Notwithstanding this valuable work, pressure on forests in the third world will not be reduced unless we enhance food production from the same piece of land year after year, as happens in the industrialized countries. This can only be achieved by a transfer of food production technology to our own countries.

I have made frequent references to the role of the international community in the restoration of democracy to my country and to the reinstatement of President Kabbah. I have mentioned the United Nations, the OAU, ECOWAS and the Commonwealth. I would like to make special reference to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The restoration of constitutional order and the various efforts of the Government to effect durable peace and to rebuild the country provide us with an opportunity to regain donor confidence and ensure the completion of various initiatives and programmes interrupted by the events of the coup of 25 May 1997.

As lead agency in the partnership between the Government and the donor community, the UNDP, prior to the coup, had spearheaded the following: preparation of a national poverty-eradication programme; facilitating the establishment of a coordination mechanism for relief assistance by the humanitarian community; and facilitating the peace process through the provision of diplomatic, logistic, technical and administrative support

to the peace negotiations and the preparation of the demobilization programme. Since the return of the elected Government in March 1998, the UNDP has spent considerable amounts of money in the development of various other programmes as well. I urge the international community to continue its support for these programmes and to help us in our task of rehabilitation.

Let me close by referring again to the report of the Secretary-General, whom I have already thanked. I shall refer once more to the special conference he convened, for which I thank the Secretary-General.

The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Casimir Oye Mba, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon.

Mr. Mba (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): I wish first to convey to Mr. Didier Opertti the warm, sincere congratulations of the Government and the delegation of Gabon on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. This is a tribute to his country, Uruguay, and an unambiguous recognition of his personal and professional qualities. Our congratulations go also to all the other Assembly officers, and we wish them every success in guiding our work. We assure them of the support and cooperation of the delegation of Gabon.

To the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-second session, Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko, who spared no effort in carrying out his responsibilities, I convey our satisfaction and our deep gratitude.

The present times are characterized by political tension, by change and by socio-economic upheaval exacerbated by a grave financial crisis; our involvement is required, in more than one respect. Gabon remains convinced that the United Nations continues to be the best forum for working together to harmonize our different approaches towards peace and development. We owe it to ourselves to consider the circumstances in which the Organization was established to free the world from the spectre of war. Was it just to prevent world war, or was it to make use of the renewed humanism inspired by the San Francisco Conference to eradicate all the causes of armed conflict wherever they might emerge so as, in the words of the Charter, "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom"?

Now more than in the past, and especially since the end of the cold war, narrow nationalism has been resurfacing to nullify all the international community's efforts to make of our world a global village in which peace and security, friendship among nations and international cooperation are the watchwords. Peace is a sine qua non for the development of peoples and of nations. That truth is easy enough to affirm, but applying it is complicated by the play of interests within States, often combined with outside interference.

This has been and remains the bitter experience of Africa. For nearly a decade, the African continent has faced multifaceted political tension and violence between and within States, just when the end of the cold war had given rise to hope that resources would be mobilized for its development.

Yet during that same period many African countries have courageously embarked on political reform and economic restructuring. Overall, there has been tangible progress. Clearly, stability is indispensable for such progress, which means that questions of international peace and security are the concern of the day on our continent, and more specifically in Central Africa. That subregion, so rich in potential, has come since the end of the cold war to be a world disrupted by "the disorder of nations", fuelled and maintained by a variety of forces.

Although living in peace within its borders and with its neighbours, Gabon is extremely concerned at this situation. President Bongo believes that our country cannot remain an isle of peace, freedom and even relative prosperity in an ocean of misery, violence and fratricidal wars. That concern is shared by the other heads of State of Central Africa, and was at the root of the summit conference held on Thursday, 24 September 1998, at Libreville, at the initiative of President Bongo, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That important meeting gave heads of State and heads of delegation an opportunity to express their support for President Kabila and to condemn the aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the interference in the internal affairs of that country. They called for the withdrawal of foreign forces of aggression; for a ceasefire in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; for respect for the territorial integrity of that country; and for continuing the process of democratization begun by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

They also stressed the need for concerted action by the countries of Central Africa, the States members of the Southern African Development Community, of the

Organization of African Unity and of the United Nations, and all those who are working to find a solution to the Congo crisis, renouncing any partisan decisions that could prolong the suffering of the peoples of Congo and of neighbouring States. The heads of State and heads of delegation of Central Africa therefore decided to establish a summit follow-up and negotiating committee under the chairmanship of the President of the Gabonese Republic, and reaffirmed that it would be appropriate to establish a regional peacekeeping force.

Turning to Angola, I wish first to honour the memory of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Maître Alioune Blondin Beye, and of members of his team, who worked tirelessly for peace in that country, tragically giving their lives to that cause. The heads of State and of delegation reaffirmed at the Libreville summit their support for the Government of Angola, which is sparing no effort in the search for lasting peace in that country and for the full and speedy implementation of the Lusaka accords.

Finally, with regard to the Republic of the Congo, the heads of State supported the reconstruction and national reconciliation efforts and condemned the destabilization manoeuvres originating outside the country.

Of course, we are not insensitive to the disturbances and violence occurring in other parts of the world — quite the contrary. Gabon shares the position of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on ways and means of resolving the problems in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Somalia and between Ethiopia and Eritrea. We are following most attentively the resumption of dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians, as seen in the recent summit meetings. These talks offer a glimmer of hope for a global settlement of the problems of the Middle East. We likewise believe that only political means will return peace to Afghanistan. With the same conviction, we encourage the efforts of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to preserve peace in South-East Asia.

A global vision of peace is certainly necessary. In fact, through the phenomenon of globalization, the shock wave of conflict is often felt very far from the epicentre. It is equally clear that development cannot be ensured in an unstable environment, for peace constitutes the fertile ground in which development must take root and prosper.

It is in that spirit that Gabon studied the remarkable report (A/52/871) that the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, submitted to the Security Council on the causes of conflict in Africa. He very rightly noted that historical legacies, internal and external factors, economic motives and particular situations are the source of many conflicts in Africa. These various causes are known to us and we must combat them.

In this respect, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly particularly to one of the causes of conflict that I believe should be given our full attention because of the many dangers it poses to the stability of our entire continent. Furthermore, this phenomenon is also evident in Central and Eastern Europe. I refer to the question of transnational populations — in other words, communities dispersed over several States as a result of various historical circumstances. Aware of the danger in Africa, the founding fathers of the OAU, in their great wisdom, inscribed in its Charter the principle of the inviolability of frontiers inherited from colonization. To reshape States on the basis of diverse claims seemed to them to be simply risky. They therefore chose to take charge of our history through the openness of integration. Gabon reaffirms its support for this approach.

All in all, the resurgence of nationalism, poor understanding and abuse of the rights of peoples as well as their manipulation, inevitably lead to national unrest, with its attendant deadly difficulties. Faced with these realities and possibilities, the Government of Gabon would more than ever like to reaffirm its commitment to certain principles which underlie the maintenance of peace and security, both internally and internationally. These include respect for human rights in general and for the rights of national minorities in particular; respect for cultural identities; respect for the territorial integrity of States; respect for national sovereignty; the principle of non-interference in internal affairs; the principle of good neighbourliness; and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes.

In any event, dialogue remains the best and most effective way of preventing conflicts and maintaining or restoring peace. Political differences must have a political response. The African populations, already overwhelmed by underdevelopment, cannot and should not have to endure, in addition, the deadly consequences of conflict. We must therefore always engage in dialogue. This is why President Bongo, sensing the changes in history and the aspirations of his people, set in motion in mid-1989 the rethinking within the former single party in our country that led to the national conference of March-April 1990, which reopened the way to pluralism and democracy.

New regulatory and control institutions have gradually been established since then and they are working. Individual and collective freedoms are recognized and enjoyed by our citizens, who can even appeal as high as the Constitutional Court, as a glance at our newspapers in Gabon suffices to make clear. This shows how deeply committed we are to the principles of participatory democracy, taking into account our overall level of development and our sociological environment.

It is also in this new context that in two months we shall be organizing presidential elections for the second time. The logistical and legislative preparations are already at a very advanced stage; they are basically the work of government. The National Electoral Commission, which is already in place, will conduct the actual electoral operations. Its representatives were appointed last week in all departments and communes. The Prime Minister sent invitations a month ago to various States and organizations, including the United Nations, to observe both the preparations and the polling process itself.

A few days ago I had the opportunity to address the Security Council on mechanisms for conflict prevention in our subregion. Without repeating the report that has been made to the Assembly, I would like to recall here that, in accordance with the decision made by the heads of State or Government of the countries of Central Africa, Defence and Interior Ministers of the countries members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, meeting in Libreville from 28 to 30 April 1998, re-examined the plan for the establishment of an early-warning mechanism as an instrument for the prevention of crises and conflicts. Gabon, which now holds the chairmanship of the Committee, is doing everything in its power to meet the logistics needs to allow Libreville to be the headquarters of that mechanism.

Along the same lines, also concerning the logic of prevention, the Committee held from 18 to 21 May 1998 in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, the first conference on the question of relationships between democratic institutions and peace in Central Africa. That conference brought together members of Governments, representatives of opposition political parties, high-ranking officials of the forces of law and order, representatives of civil society and experts on matters of political freedoms, the press and human rights. The participants' main recommendation was the establishment of a subregional parliament of Central Africa, which would be charged with dealing with questions of common interest, with a view to strengthening measures for confidence-building and subregional peace, while serving as a forum for harmonization of views and the promotion of values related to the democratic experiences of member States. In general, we can say that the action of the Committee is a needed extension of the Organization of African Unity's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

All these preventive measures would be in vain if the international community made no further disarmament efforts. My country supports the high priority given by the United Nations to the question of disarmament in general and to the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in particular. Even if the harm they can cause is less, we are also concerned about the proliferation of conventional weapons, which are also tools of death and destruction. We therefore commend the statement by the President of the Security Council on the occasion of the ministerial meeting on Africa held on 24 September 1998, in which the Council asked the ad hoc Working Group to elaborate further concrete recommendations on the need to stem illicit arms flows to and in Africa.

The President returned to the Chair.

Apart from these concerns, we have certain grounds for satisfaction. Disarmament took a step forward very recently with the adoption of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which I personally signed on behalf of Gabon on 4 December 1997 in Ottawa, and which has just entered into force with the deposit of the fortieth instrument of ratification by an African country, Burkina Faso.

Other significant instruments, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, have become a reality. Gabon, convinced of the prominent role of disarmament in the maintenance of international peace and security, is a signatory of these important instruments. My country invites all States Members of the United Nations to work towards complete and general disarmament in the twenty-first century, the guarantor of a lasting peace. We must make the quest for peace a cardinal point of reference.

However, that peace will remain in jeopardy as long as the basic needs of peoples are not met. The persistence of conflicts, non-respect for the human person, hatred and the rejection of democratic values all have serious

repercussions on the economic health of States. Likewise, the phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, epidemics and the cost of reconstruction in the wake of war all are burdens that affect already fragile economies and aggravate difficult social situations.

The situation at this end of century makes it imperative for the international community to deal with development and social issues if we wish to prevent our world from self-destructing. The content of the 1998 *Human Development Report*, published by the United Nations Development Programme a few weeks ago, strengthens this conviction. The conclusions of the 1995 Copenhagen summit therefore remain valid, and the United Nations must again take the initiative.

Statements of intention no longer suffice. We need concrete action and realistic programmes that take into account the phenomenon of globalization. These programmes must ensure that no one is excluded and that each of our nations, by making the necessary efforts to adapt, can become integrated in the most harmonious way possible. That is why Gabon believes it necessary to relaunch the idea of a new partnership based on fairness in order to respond to the legitimate aspirations of people — mainly, to eliminate poverty and to promote well-being.

With globalization, States' autonomy and room for manoeuvre has been greatly reduced. The power of Governments is offset by the power of the markets. Openness and freedom, however, must not come to mean free rein to establish the law of the jungle, in which we, the small and the weak, will inevitably be crushed and destroyed.

In this context, it seemed necessary to the Government of Gabon not to abdicate but to refocus the role of the State. A new direction has been reflected, *inter alia*, through an ambitious programme of liberalization of economic activities on the one hand and on the other by the privatization of large sectoral public enterprises.

As for the structure of the economy of Gabon, let me say that our country remains dependent on the sale of three principal raw materials: oil, wood and manganese. The prices of these products have been on the decline for several months now. If we factor in the fluctuations in the United States dollar, which is also on the decline, we can see that the result is a decrease in the income of the State, which puts the country's investment and development capacities in considerable jeopardy.

This fact is not the only handicap to my country's development. The debt and its servicing absorb almost 45 per cent of our budgetary resources. This is truly intolerable.

All of this notwithstanding, the international financial institutions continue to classify Gabon as an upper middle-income country, thus preventing its access to financing on flexible terms. Gabon is the only sub-Saharan African country in this situation, which is simply unjust.

Gabon, a developing country just like any other, asks that international financial institutions apply new assessment criteria and, above all, that they give more appropriate consideration to our debt burden in order further to unleash our productive capabilities. This would benefit not only the people of Gabon but also our partners abroad.

Other major problems must also mobilize the international community, *inter alia*, the drug problem, terrorism, major pandemics, human rights and the environment.

The General Assembly held its twentieth special session on the fight against drugs last June. Gabon is pleased that on that occasion our Organization enshrined the criminal nature of the traffic in drugs and broadened the options for solutions to this scourge at the global level. That session gave political impetus to the international efforts of States in the fight against drug trafficking, which now spares no country. The Government of Gabon invites the United Nations and its specialized agencies to further support the efforts made in this respect at the regional level.

As for the scourge of terrorism, and bearing in mind the horrible attacks in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, I must first of all pay a tribute of compassion and respect to the memory of the Kenyan, Tanzanian and American citizens who lost their lives there. I express my deepest sympathy to all of those persons who were wounded. Above all, the Government of Gabon most forcefully reaffirms its condemnation of acts of terrorism in all their manifestations, wherever they may occur. We believe that no cause can justify resorting to such acts. But I also denounce certain retaliatory measures that they inspire, in particular the placing of countries that are suspected of involvement under embargo. This type of response is neither appropriate nor efficient. In most cases, those

types of measures affect mainly innocent civilian populations.

We believe, therefore, that under the auspices of the United Nations, urgent dialogue must be undertaken to explore ways and means of preventing and combating terrorism.

In the field of human rights, Gabon welcomes the creation of an International Criminal Court, as established by the Statute adopted at Rome on 17 July last. The same applies to the Organization of African Unity Protocol, which created, at the organization's thirty-fourth summit, a Pan-African Court of Justice.

Because of industrial development, environmental questions have become an increasingly pressing concern for the international community. The awareness to which the Rio Summit gave rise unfortunately was not followed up by the concrete measures that were expected. Commitments have not been fulfilled, and as time goes by, the Rio consensus must lead us more than ever towards a necessary commitment if we wish to avoid its remaining a dead letter.

I should like also to take this opportunity to express my delegation's satisfaction with, and its support for, the efforts made by the International Seabed Authority, the guarantor of a common heritage of humankind, in the consideration of a draft code on the mining, exploration and exploitation of the seabed.

We must make sincere and tireless efforts on all of these major issues. I very much appreciate the work of our Organization, which, through its executing bodies, its specialized agencies and with the support of other organizations, is making every effort to achieve these noble objectives.

As I already said last year, Gabon supports the idea that the United Nations system needs rational and consistent renewal, in keeping with today's realities. The proposals of the Secretary-General on the reform of the budgetary, administrative, social and economic sectors reflect a spirit of innovation that will make it possible to face the challenges of the new millennium.

More specifically, as regards the thorny question of the expansion of the Security Council, Gabon is, of course, in favour of it. We believe Africa should have two permanent seats — I repeat, two permanent seats — which would be occupied on a rotational basis by all African countries — I repeat, all African countries — in accordance with modalities to be determined by them.

Before concluding, allow me to commend the achievements of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. We know his task is immense and difficult. He has already accomplished a great deal, with courage and skill. I have already mentioned the promising views he shared with the Security Council on the eradication of conflicts and the promotion of lasting peace in Africa. For Africa, and for the entire international community, we must encourage and support him.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Draft resolution (A/53/L.1)

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia to introduce draft resolution A/53/L.1.

Mr. Hidayat (Indonesia): Before I introduce this draft resolution, I would like to make a small correction to the text. The draft resolution is submitted by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

It is a matter of great honour for my delegation to introduce, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the draft resolution contained in the document A/53/L.1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods", under agenda item 20 (b), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions".

It is with a heavy conscience that I introduce this draft resolution on the alarming conditions in the wake of one of the most disastrous floods to hit the people of Bangladesh in recent memory. The magnitude of the

widespread destruction and the toll in human life has not only made this natural disaster a major calamity, it has far exceeded the capacity and resources of the people and the Government of Bangladesh to cope with it.

In this context, we are certainly encouraged by the resilience and courage of the people and the Government of Bangladesh in their effort to alleviate the suffering of disaster victims and to put the country back on the road to development. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that there are limitations to the Government's ability to overcome these difficulties which constitute a development problem of great magnitude. It is therefore imperative that the international community demonstrate its solidarity in mobilizing resources — both financial and technical assistance — to support the effort already undertaken by the people and the Government of Bangladesh.

We need also to ensure that the assistance mobilized will not only alleviate the present suffering but also go a long way on the path towards reconstruction and development. Therefore, the Group of 77 and China seriously appeal to all Member States to support this draft resolution at this hour of the Bangladeshi people's greatest need.

Before concluding, I have the pleasure to announce that a number of countries have expressed their desire to sponsor the draft resolution. In addition to the countries of the Group of 77 and China, these countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

Mr. Manz (Austria): Very briefly, allow me, on behalf of the European Union, to express our deep sympathy and concern regarding the loss of life and the unprecedented destruction of property and infrastructure caused by the worst ever floods in Bangladesh. The European Union is aware that this disaster constitutes a major challenge for the development of the country, calling for national and international financial and technical assistance. The European Community and its member States have contributed generously to assist in the immediate relief and rehabilitation efforts. For this reason, the member States of the European Union have co-sponsored this draft resolution.

Mr. Kamitani (Japan): On behalf of the delegation of Japan, I would like to salute the draft resolution about to be adopted by the General Assembly entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods".

Japan is greatly concerned about the extensive damage caused by the floods that have stuck Bangladesh one after the other since mid-July, rendering 52 of the country's 64 districts a disaster area.

At the end of August, the Government of Japan donated emergency humanitarian assistance, such as medicine, medical equipment, water-purifying tablets and plastic sheets, valued at about 30 million yen, to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Today, 1 October, my Government decided to dispatch a Japan disaster-relief team of experts to Bangladesh and to donate related emergency material assistance, such as medicine and water-purifying tablets, again worth a total of about 30 million yen. Furthermore, on 2 October, in view of the extent of the damage, the Government of Japan is scheduled to announce that it will provide the Government of Bangladesh with $400,000 in emergency assistance on humanitarian grounds.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/53/L.1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/53/L.1 was adopted (resolution 53/1).

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I would like to express, on behalf of the Government of Bangladesh, our gratitude for the adoption by consensus at this plenary meeting of the General Assembly resolution 53/1, entitled "Assistance to Bangladesh in the wake of the devastating floods". Coincidentally, this is the first resolution to be adopted by the fifty-third session.

The magnitude of the floods this year was unprecedented. It overwhelmed our normal ability and preparation for adequate response. Quick mobilization of assistance in support of the efforts of the Bangladesh

Government by all Member States, the United Nations system, multilateral and regional financial institutions and non-governmental organizations necessitated that we adopt a resolution at this session of the General Assembly with such urgency.

The resolution just adopted will have the effect of harmonizing the ongoing efforts of different entities that stepped forward to extend assistance to Bangladesh. The resolution expresses solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh and appeals to all Member States and the United Nations system to respond urgently to assist Bangladesh in its efforts to overcome the damages caused by the floods.

The General Assembly expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the steps he took to mobilize humanitarian assistance and requests the United Nations system to take all necessary measures to support Bangladesh and to strengthen its capacity for seeking a long-term solution to problems caused by floods and natural disasters.

The Government of Bangladesh conveys its deep appreciation to Indonesia, which submitted and introduced the draft resolution on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as its Chairman. I would also like to sincerely thank all the delegations that have spontaneously come forward to support and sponsor the resolution on very short notice.

A General Assembly resolution is the expression of opinion of the entire world. Through the adoption of today's resolution, the entire United Nations membership and the international community have expressed solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh.

The country is now effectively engaged in relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities under the dynamic and compassionate leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

I wish to thank all Member States again for standing by our side in Bangladesh's hour of need.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 20.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.